



Action! Illinois film and TV business doubled in 2013

By Greg Hinz

Published January 21, 2014

Illinois suddenly is boffo — big time — for Hollywood.

Propelled by a hit TV series and another one perhaps in the making, the film industry generated a whopping \$358 million in spending in the state last year, almost twice the previous record, Gov. Pat Quinn will announce today.

According to data to be released today, six television shows, three major motion pictures and roughly 150 commercial productions shot here in 2013. The estimated \$358 million in local spending they generated easily surpassed the prior record of \$184 million in 2012, and came in well above the average \$100 million or so a year in work the state garnered in the decade of the 2000s.

The big contributor is producer Dick Wolf, whose "Law and Order" franchise has been based in New York and Los Angeles and whose new collection (first "Chicago Fire" and now "Chicago PD") does almost all of its shooting in the Windy City.

"Chicago Fire" alone spent \$58 million in 2013, of which \$30 million went directly to Illinois wages, according to Mr. Quinn's office, with \$111 million in spending since 2011. "Chicago PD" is airing its third episode this week but has spent \$21 million here so far. Those weeks and weeks upon end of TV shooting may not be quite as glamorous as a movie. But, as my colleague Paul Merrion reported, they keep on giving because, assuming a show is renewed, it keeps on churning week after week.

"These record-breaking numbers show there is no better place to film than Illinois," said Mr. Quinn, who is due to visit the set of "Chicago Fire" today to underline the point. Such projects "create thousands of jobs across the state, from actors to painters and carpenters, and the hundreds of small businesses that serve the industry."

Mr. Quinn did a couple of things the industry particularly liked.

In 2011, he signed a 10-year extension of production tax credits, worth up to 30 percent of the total cost of a project, including post-production. The credits last year cost the state an estimated \$39.3 million, officials say.

Mr. Quinn also was helped by a \$5 million state grant he directed toward development of the Cinespace facility on the old Ryerson Steel property on the Near West Side.

Developed by the same Canadian company that produced the film "Chicago" (in Canada), the complex of 18 planned and current soundstages is the largest in the country outside of Hollywood, Mr. Quinn said.

The state also has done well picking up big-screen productions lately, with portions of "Divergent," "Jupiter Ascending" and "Transformers 4" shot here, after earlier Superman and Batman entries a couple of years earlier.

All of last year's work created the equivalent of 4,200 full-time jobs, according to the state.

Update — Illinois Film Office Managing Director Betsy Steinberg says she thinks the good news is going to keep coming.

With film credits now extended for years, and a major sound-stage complex in place and expanding, "We have a different level of infrastructure than we've ever had. We're in a more permanent tier" than in earlier years, when the business occasionally would melt away to almost nothing, she said in a phone interview. "People no longer have to go to Los Angeles or London to do their sound work."

Ms. Steinberg says she's hoping that the folks at Cinespace soon will add a water stage. "That would be huge," allowing Chicago to compete for pictures shot on the water. Think pirates of Lake Michigan.

Ms. Steinberg didn't say too much about why Dick Wolf now "loves" shooting in Chicago. Nor did she say too much about what's coming up later this year, beyond saying that both of Mr. Wolf's shows are doing well in the ratings and are likely to be renewed by NBC, and that some big film projects "are circling" before making a final decision.

But there is some industry buzz that Mr. Wolf is considering a third Chicago show. Meanwhile, the city film office released its own figures. The office tracks days shot, not money spent, and according to it, production activity grew 20 percent, to 2,198 filming days. "These record stats reflect our city's greater capacity and maturity as a true production center," said office Director Rich Moskal.